



Fact Sheet

South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control • www.scdhec.gov

Rabies

What Is <i>Rabies</i>?	<p>Rabies is a preventable viral disease of mammals most often transmitted through the bite of a rabid animal. The vast majority of rabies cases reported in the US each year occur in wild animals like raccoons, skunks, bats, and foxes. Domestic animals account for less than 10% of the reported rabies cases, with cats, cattle, and dogs most often reported rabid.</p> <p>The rabies virus infects the central nervous system and will ultimately result in death if not treated early. In the United States, human fatalities associated with rabies occur in people who fail to seek medical assistance, usually because they were unaware of their exposure.</p>
What are the symptoms?	Early symptoms of rabies in humans usually consists of fever, headache, and general malaise. As the disease progresses, neurological symptoms appear and may include insomnia, anxiety, confusion, slight or partial paralysis, excitation, hallucinations, agitation, hypersalivation, difficulty swallowing, and hydrophobia (fear of water). Death usually occurs within days of the onset of symptoms.
How is <i>Rabies</i> treated?	There is no drug treatment for rabies after symptoms of the disease appear. However, there is an extremely effective new rabies vaccine regimen that provides immunity to rabies when administered after an exposure, but before symptoms appear. That is why it is very important to see a doctor immediately if you have been bitten by an animal.
How do people catch this disease?	The most common way the rabies virus is transmitted is through a bite, scratch or other exposure to the virus-containing saliva of an infected animal.
What can be done to protect my family and pets and stop the spread of this disease?	<p>Be a responsible pet owner. Keep vaccinations up-to-date for all dogs, cats and ferrets. This requirement is important not only to keep your pets from getting rabies, but also to provide a barrier of protection to you, if your pet is bitten by a rabid, wild animal. You should also keep your pets under direct supervision so they do not come in contact with wild animals. If your pet is bitten by a wild animal, seek veterinary assistance for the animal immediately.</p> <p>Avoid direct contact with unfamiliar animals. Enjoy wild animals (raccoons, skunks, foxes) from afar. Do not handle, feed, or unintentionally attract wild animals with open garbage cans, litter or pet food left outside. Never adopt wild animals or bring them into your home. Do not try to nurse sick animals to health. Call animal control or an animal rescue agency for assistance. Teach children never to handle unfamiliar animals, wild or domestic, even if they appear friendly. Prevent bats from entering living quarters or occupied spaces in homes, churches, schools, and other similar areas, where they might come in contact with people and pets.</p> <p>If you have any questions about coming into contact with wild animals, call your local animal control department or the S.C. Dept. of Natural Resources.</p>

SOUTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONTROL

Region 7

Serving Berkeley, Charleston and Dorchester Counties

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